

RULE OF BENEDICT- CHAPTER 42: SILENCE AFTER COMPLINE

1 Monks should diligently cultivate silence at all times, but especially at night. 2 Accordingly, this will always be the arrangement whether for fast days or for ordinary days. 3 When there are two meals, all the monks will sit together immediately after rising from supper. Someone should read from the Conferences or the Lives of the Fathers or at any rate something else that will benefit the hearers, 4 but not the Heptateuch or the Books of Kings, because it will not be good for those of weak understanding to hear these writings at that hour; they should be read at other times. 5 On fast days there is to be a short interval between Vespers and the reading of the Conferences, as we have indicated. 6 Then let four or five pages be read, or as many as time permits. 7 This reading period will allow for all to come together, in case any were engaged in assigned tasks. 8 When all have assembled, they should pray Compline; and on leaving Compline, no one will be permitted to speak further. 9 If anyone is found to transgress this rule of silence, he must be subjected to severe punishment, 10 except on occasions when guests require attention or the abbot wishes to give someone a command, 11 but even this is to be done with the utmost seriousness and proper restraint.

(Commentary by Philip Lawrence, OSB, Abbot of Christ in the Desert)

“Here we touch on the theme of silence once again. There is no doubt that in the Rule of Benedict, silence is one of the most important aspects of a monk. Learning to be silent is more than just keeping the external silence. On the other hand, if one cannot keep external silence, then probably the internal silence is not very profound either. It really is a challenge for the monk to be still and silent in the face of God and with his brothers.

This chapter focuses on silence at night. It is absolutely clear that after Compline no one should be speaking. There is the clear exception of the necessity of guests and the clear exception of the Abbot’s role in the monastery. But even here, the relationship of a monk with the guests must be utterly serious and with great restraint. And this injunction applies to the Abbot as well in his relationship with the monks.

In between the first and the last part of this Chapter, we have some recommendation for the evening. The monks are not left to be on their own, but have a common reading in the evening between Vespers and Compline, except for those who have assigned tasks.

Why silence? It is not simply because it creates a more disciplined atmosphere. Discipline is not the end or goal of the Rule. Rather we must think of silence as creating an atmosphere in which our conversation is with God. This is what Saint Benedict is looking for. The monk is always trying to cultivate and deepen the relationship with the Lord. And the discipline of the monastery is formed to create an atmosphere in which this relationship of the monk with God is supported and nurtured.

May we all find silence in our hearts and in our external practice so that we may come to have more prayer and a deeper relationship with the Lord.”

Compline Psalmody:

- Psalm 4 (*Psalm 132*)
- Psalm 91 (*Psalm 133*)
- Psalm 134

Antiphon: “Save us Lord while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with Him in peace.”

Nunc Dimitis (Now Dismiss)

“At last all powerful Master,
You give leave to your servant,
To go in peace according to your
promise.

For my eyes have seen Your
Salvation
Which you have prepared for all
nations.
The Light to enlighten the Gentiles
And give glory to your people
Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32)

Antiphon: “Save us Lord while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with Him in peace.”

Response: “Into your hands Lord, I commend my spirit. You have redeemed us, Lord God of Truth. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be; world without end. Amen.”

Concluding Prayer: “Visit this house we pray you, Lord: drive far away from it all the snares of the enemy. May your holy angels stay here and guard us in peace, and let your blessing be always upon us. Through Christ our Lord.”

Blessing: “The Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end” Amen.